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The Chief's Office of the San Diego Police Department will continue sending monthly press releases outlining any major concerns discussed at personal meetings, community meetings, or highlighted by recent national events. Based on these sources of input, the topic of problem solving has been the focal point of recent meetings. With this month's release, I will outline the San Diego Police Department's method for problem solving in the San Diego community.

Problem solving, or problem oriented policing (POP), has been an important crime-fighting tool for the San Diego Police Department over the years. POP falls directly under the umbrella of community oriented policing utilizing problem solving techniques to identify and solve crime in the community. Using POP, officers look at a problem in the community that has occurred, is occurring, or has the potential to occur. A problem can be identified as criminal, civil, or a quality of life issue. Once the problem has been identified, the department uses another problem solving technique described by the acronym S.A.R.A. S.A.R.A stands for Scanning, Analysis, Response, and Assessment. We use the S.A.R.A model as an equation and apply the problem to it; working through the equation, the real issues of the problem are identified.

The first step of the S.A.R.A equation is scanning. Scanning directly involves the process of identifying the problem. Identification can be done when there are two or more incidents that are related in one or more ways that are likely to cause harm and the public expects police action. Police investigations, community forums, or personal observations can initiate the scanning part of the equation.

The second part of the S.A.R.A equation is analysis. Analysis is the step in the process where we ask, what do we need to know about the problem? This information can come from stats, police documentation, and personal knowledge. The information can be gathered from community meetings, a community relations officer, or public officials. Under the analysis phase, the San Diego Police Department also uses the philosophy of the "crime triangle". The crime triangle represents three elements necessary for a crime to take place. One side represents the victim, the second the suspect, and the third the location. In order to have a crime you must have all three elements. Having said this, to eliminate crime, you need to take away just one of the three sides. During analysis, each side of the crime triangle is studied in order to determine where the most impact can be made.

The third step in the S.A.R.A equation is response. Response is where we try to manage, reduce, or eliminate the problem. Within this step, we also try to shift the problem to the correct resources or if applicable remove it entirely from consideration.

The fourth and final step in the S.A.R.A equation is assessment. The assessment phase is where we as the problem solvers take a step back and look at the project from its inception through the enforcement period. We ask ourselves how we did and could we have done better. We also look at whether the action was worth the cost and effort and most importantly was the problem eliminated or reduced.

In closing, the S.A.R.A model is only a tool to use when a problem has been mentioned or discovered. In order for the S.A.R.A model to work, there needs to be a team of dedicated people who are willing to work for a solution. Being part of a group such as neighborhood watch, a community forum, or church congregation, is important to make the theory of problem oriented policing work for your community.

Chief William Lansdowne